

# Schools prepare for higher standards

## Changes to assessment likely to mean lower scores

BY JODY NORWOOD

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School assessment in Kentucky will have a different look in coming weeks as the state releases new college and career readiness measurements.

The state Department of Education looks to the end of October to release results of the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, K-PREP. Students in the third-grade and above were tested for the first time last spring, replacing Kentucky Core Content Tests.

Terry Holliday, the state's commissioner of education, warned teachers this month to expect lower scores in reading and math as the model and standards are different from past years. The new system uses federal accountability standards in place of No Child Left Behind requirements, Kentucky was one of 10 states receiving waivers from NCLB obligations earlier this year.



Holliday

Under K-PREP guidelines, a new format, with more consideration, will show district performance. School scores will include testing, graduation rates, ACT scores and other factors.

"Every school will get an overall score from 1 to 100," said Lisa Gross, KDE communications

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director. "We will average these scores and put them into percentiles. We know the percentages are going to look a lot different. They will probably be lower."

Under the new standards, districts at or below the 69th percentile will be deemed as Needs Improvement. Districts in the top 30 percent will be considered as Proficient or Distinguished. Scores will be used to determine a school's annual measurable objective, which replaces the adequate yearly progress, AYP. Districts were required to meet under former federal requirements.

Area districts are preparing to see how they rank in the new standards, and how to relate those scores to parents. For McCracken County Schools, district assessment coordinator Melanie Jarvis said the new system compares districts from across the state against each other, as opposed to just meeting standards.

"Once the numbers come out, and we have that overall score, they will rank us

and put us in a percentile ranking," Jarvis said. "They have to rank us that way. Otherwise, that number would just be arbitrary. You have to stack it up against other districts in the state. We're expecting the scores to go down, but we expect to be high in the ranks in comparison to other schools in the state."

Jarvis said the new system moved away from districts teaching basic proficiencies to better measure students for college and career readiness.

Donald Shively, Paducah assistant superintendent, said the new standards are part of the state's efforts to fulfill Senate Bill 1 as other states consider moving to national accountability. According to the KDE, Kentucky assessments will be more closely aligned to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

"As a state, we're on the forefront of adopting common core standards," Shively said. "But when you implement them right away, there are going to be some gaps that become ap-

parent. We've increased the rigor, but we've also raised the bar for what it takes to be proficient."

In Graves County, Assistant Superintendent Carla Whitis said scores will provide a more comprehensive look at how students are performing and a better measurement based on factors outside of just an individual score.

"There's a litany of testing, especially at the high school level, where there's already a tremendous amount," Whitis said. "We've always looked at groups of students to make sure they were growing. This focuses on it a little more."

Gross said K-PREP scores and rankings could be presented to school districts in mid-October prior to being released to the public. Several area districts are planning to relay information on the standards to parents prior to the release, both through material sent home with students and on school web sites.

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# Students will be better 'PREP'-ed for college through new state exam

By MAGEN MCCRAREY  
Staff writer

A new era of assessment and accountability has begun in the 2012-13 school year, not only Laurel County but the entire state. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability method took a back seat when Senate Bill 1 passed in the 2009 session of the Kentucky General Assembly, and students should be ready for a more rigorous test.

The new model is dubbed the "Unbridled Learning" Accountability Model. Students will no longer take the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCCT), formerly known as CATS, but will take the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) instead. Schools will focus more on school achievement, growth, college/career readiness and the graduation rate, instead of meeting all or nothing target goals.

For districts across the state, this means higher accountability for the next-generation learners who are going to compete in the global economy. K-PREP testing is a nationally comparable exam. Kentucky and other states developed common standards for reading and math, so there will be consistency nationwide.

## New scoring scale

While scores are expected to be low the first year — even though student achievement may have increased — the new test is the best way to provide consistency throughout the nation.

The new test cannot be compared to the previous one in any way, said Tharon Hurley, director of Assessment and Accountability for Laurel County Schools, so it will take time to know the true measure of student success.

"The test is completely different and standards have changed," he added.

## KDE tips on how to stay up-to-date on your child's success:

- Talk to your child's teacher and principal if you're concerned about test scores
- Ask what is being done to help children be successful, and ask what else is available to show whether your child is progressing
- Make sure that your child goes to school every day and completes assignments
- Use your smartphone to stay up-to-date with your child's education by accessing the Infinite Campus Parent Portal app to verify attendance, check on grades, review your child's agenda and more

Students, schools, and the district were used to aiming for scores up to 140 on their KCCCT, but now scores are measured by percentages and top out at 100. A school that may have reached a 110 in the past, may now be looking down at a 40-60 percentile this year.

"Parents and community who aren't accustomed to the system will be able to look at that and have a better feel of where their school, child and district are in comparison to the state, as opposed to where they were in the past," Hurley said.

## New district standards

NCLB was based upon schools meeting all or nothing target goals, but the Unbridled Learning Accountability Model will place schools and districts in categories based upon their percentage total. The recognition or reward categories are labeled as highest-performing and high-progress, whereas underperforming or support categories are labeled as priority schools/districts and focus schools/districts. Districts are to strive as highest-performing schools by meeting their Annual Measurable Objectives along with a high student participation rate, graduation rate goal and graduation rate of 60 percent or above for the prior two years.

## Test will be good indicator of college readiness

Students will take approximately three levels of testing throughout their school career. The first level is the MAP test, administered to grades K-3. The next is the K-PREP for students in grades 3-8, which will predict the success of a student on the ACT college entrance exam.

"In the past, at the high school

level students never really paid attention to KCCCT. It didn't mean anything to them. It never affected how they got into college," Hurley said. "Hopefully students will pay more attention in terms of how well they are doing in these end-of-course assessments because they all lead up to the ACT."

Schools, districts and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) will continue to publicly report student outcome measures in math, reading and science. Percentages and school/district information will be published online through the KDE website. KDE has raised expectations for all students, including students identified with educational disabilities, with an emphasis on college and career readiness.

The new standards are expected to help teachers prepare students for a changing world and connect education with the economy and employment, according to KDE. Graduation rates will be more accurate, as well as student assessment scores — allowing students to leave high school well prepared.

"Things have changed for the better," Hurley said.

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# K-Prep test challenges for global measure

The Kentucky Department of Education is trying to help local school districts prepare their teachers and the public for huge student testing declines when the state releases results from the new K-Prep assessment in late October. Education Commissioner Terry Holliday has warned districts to expect double-digit percentage declines for student proficiency in reading and math.

You might ask, if so many people already know to expect declines, why are education officials worried about the reaction to the K-Prep results?

There are several reasons.

First, after 10 years of testing under the CATS system, parents, teachers and the public will have to learn how to interpret the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, which was developed from the General Assembly's adoption of Senate Bill 1 in 2009. Previously, students were tested for basic knowledge in math and reading. The new assessment raises the bar to compete nationally and globally. K-Prep ranks students for college and career readiness.

Also, the scoring method changes. Schools and the districts will receive a score from a scale of 0 to 100. The score will be calculated from test scores, graduation rates and rankings for college and career readiness. Based on the results, schools and districts will be ranked as "distinguished," "proficient" or "needs improvement."

While learning this new system, the public will also have to accept that the assessment results released in October will not be comparable to scores from previous years.

The state is planting a new measuring stick on a new playing field. It's tougher, and the results are going to be low in the beginning, state officials warn.

In a recent article for the Kentucky Teacher newsletter, the education commissioner said, "Our reasons for the low scores are legitimate, and we should share and explain those to our communities. However, we cannot allow those reasons to become an excuse that keeps us from accepting the reality that our schools need to make greater and faster progress for the sake of Kentucky's children and our state."

More evidence of what to expect comes from the Kentucky School Boards Association, which published a chart of expected testing declines from Holliday's office. The chart is described as a rough estimate. Statewide reading proficiency could fall 36 percent in elementary schools, 30 percent in middle schools and 25 percent in high schools, according to the state chart. Math proficiency could fall 37 percent in elementary school, 29 percent in middle school and 10 percent in high school.

It's important to remember the new assessment is intended to be tougher. Schools will be expected to improve each year and to work on needs unique to low-income and minority students.

The new assessment is based on common core standards already adopted in 46 states. It's time to compare our children to the rest of the country and to the world. That's where they will compete in the future.

Kentucky New Era editorials are the consensus opinion of the editorial board, which meets every week and includes Publisher Taylor W. Hayes, Opinion Editor Jennifer P. Brown and Editor Eli Pace.

**OUR OPINION**

# School accountability raises major questions

## Scores to be released to districts, public in October

**Mark Bell**  
Contributing Writer

The leadership of Harlan County Schools is growing increasingly concerned by the direction the state's new accountability measures appear to be taking.

During Thursday's special meeting, members of the Harlan County Board of Education were briefed by Superintendent Mike Howard and Assistant Superintendent Brent Roark regarding the new assessments and what they and the public can expect to see from them.

"Board members, school staff, parents and the communi-

ty need to be informed of massive changes associated with the release of the 2012 assessment results," Roark reported.

"(Kentucky Department of Education) Commission Dr. Terry Holliday has stated that proficiency rates may go down from 70-80 percent to 40-50 percent," he added. "This drop is attributable to the new assessment, new common standards, and higher cut scores for proficiency."

A "cut score" is the point at which a school or district moves from one category to another. Those categories are: Distinguished, Proficient or Needs Improvement. The new accountability scoring system

is based on school performance in five categories: Achievement, Gap, Growth, Graduation Rate, and College/Career Readiness.

Under the new testing and accountability system, all schools will be compared to one another and ranked. All schools will receive a single number that indicates their overall accountability performance. All schools will be ranked based on their accountability number on a standard bell curve.

What alarms local leaders most of all is the declaration by Holliday and KDE that 69 percent of all schools will be labeled as "needs improvement" regardless of their score.

"If a teacher told their classroom they were going to fail 69 percent of them regardless of their scores, there'd be chaos in there," Roark commented. "That's what the state is doing to us."

Districts will receive scores in early October and they will be released to the public later in the month, but no specific dates for either action have been announced.

The assessment results and accountability reports will be

available within the new school report card, but some new rounds of testing have already been taking place. By doing so before districts know how their district has been ranked, teachers and supervisors have no way to determine how to improve student performance for the next year, Howard commented.

"This is a very complicated accountability model that will be a nightmare to explain to the public," Roark told the board. "Questions still exist with exactly how the growth component will be calculated."

Adding to the confusion, this year's scores cannot be compared to scores from any prior year, including last year, Roark added.

And it's not just student scores that are being brought under the magnifying glass. The evaluation

system for staff includes a requirement for principals to take their exam, and they are permitted to fail it only once. They are locked out of the system after the second failure. The exams cost several hundred dollars each and there is a 60 percent failure rate among those taking the exam for the first time, Howard said.

This confusion over assessments and mounting pressure for accountability among public school districts has led to increased speculation that the political push for charter schools in Kentucky is driving much of the planning on this issue at the state level, Howard said.

Despite the growing caution, optimism remained in the great improvements being shown by students in recent testing.

"We know our Explore scores were fantastic," Roark told the

board. "We actually exceeded the state average. Our PLAN and ACT scores improved. This will be reflected under the category of growth with the ACT scores also contributing to the category of college/career readiness."

"Our graduation rate increased from 63.23 percent to 71.6. This will contribute to a very good score in the graduation rate category. We know our career ready numbers were greatly improved and this will contribute to a very good score in the college/career readiness category."

"We know our EOC individual scores were a 'B' average and above, and we are confident this will translate into good achievement and gap category scores for the high school," Roark said. "Everything else hinges on performance on the K-PREP exam which was taken in the spring and we still have no idea of how our schools performed on it."

Scale, academic rigor influence decline in K-PREPS scores

By Ben Sheroan

Following the advice of the Kentucky Department of Education, local school districts are distributing a message of reduced expectation regarding test scores.

The annual CATS exam gave way for a more rigorous K-PREPS test as Kentucky became the first state in the nation to adopt new "common core standards" that serve as a national benchmark for curriculum and assessment.

Related to the change, parents should expect to see a significant drop in score totals for schools and districts, according to the DOE's Office of Assessment and Accountability.

That's because of a different scoring system plus an increased challenge of the test, said Mark Kopp, associate superintendent for instructional services at Hardin County Schools.

"It doesn't mean students did worse on the test," Kopp said.

The CATS assessment was based on a scale of 140. New K-PREP scores will be lower because it issues a score from 0 to 100.

"Also, the rigor of the test is dramatically different," Kopp said.

In addition to the test's difficulty factor, material being tested is different. Mike Selvitelle, director of assessments and technology for Elizabethtown Independent Schools, said it will take time for necessary curriculum changes to be made.

"It's so different and so new that there will be some changes," Selvitelle said.

As an example, Kopp described some basic algebra material previously taught to high school sophomores now is an expectation of seventh-grade students.

Kopp said the new assessment's results should be seen as a baseline report on reading and math skills and should not be compared to previous scores.

"It should be judged differently because the rules have changed," he said.

Districts are being encouraged to trumpet the message anticipating lower scores, said Kopp, who praised adjustments made by teachers and work done by students.

"In all honesty, our students are doing a wonderful job," he said.

While it has an immediate impact on scores, administrators expect the new criteria to be a long-term benefit for students.

Individualized student assessments, which are not released publicly, will be available to parents and teachers to build improvement plans.

Selvitelle said as the years pass, student progress will be monitored with great accuracy, allowing for more individualized assessment and performance plans.

Another emphasis built into the system is college or career readiness of all students, Kopp said. That focus will help the administration and teachers develop more impactful curriculum maps and pacing guides to help ensure success of graduates, he said.

Because the overall assessment includes multiple factors beyond the base test score, Kopp said schools will be focused on instruction rather than some cases where teaching for the test may have occurred.

"There's no 'gaming' this system," Kopp said.

The school systems expect to receive data from the state by mid-October. After local administrators review details for accuracy, school and district scores will be made public.